

(PP1) Matthew 18:15-20

“Gyroscopic Grace”

If you have a smart phone with you today, take it out and open it up to the menu screen. Press your “photo” button, and click on a favorite picture. Now, turn your phone sideways. It’s like magic, isn’t it? No matter how many times you turn or twist your smart phone – or your tablet at home – the screen turns and twists right along with you, keeping whatever it is you are looking at right-side-up.

Chances are, the first time you encountered this feature, which is now standard on just about every piece of mobile technology, it made you smile, or maybe even laugh out loud. *We are not used to things “righting” themselves are we?*

Typically, if something is out of whack in life, we notice it, and we try to make it right. Perhaps that is what makes the screen on our smart phone so charming. It does the fixing, or “righting” itself.

Of course, it isn’t magic that keeps our smart phone or ipad screens in sync with us. It is science. Inside our favorite device is a gyroscope, which, when coupled with an accelerometer, senses precise motion along six axes: up/down, left/right, forward/backward. It even keeps tabs on the speed with which we move.

The result is a device that not only keeps our pictures facing the right direction, but one that can also track the number of steps we take while power-walking. Believe it or not, this *does* relate to our Gospel lesson this morning because in it, we hear Jesus urging us to keep our relationships right-side up.

The only problem is that, unlike our smart phones and iPads, we don’t have a built-in gyroscope making it automatic **and easy**. Thank God that

God has given us something we might call “gyroscopic grace”, which unflinchingly, and without any merit of our own, rights us back up with God. (PP2) However, getting *right with each other* – that is sometimes another story, isn’t it?

In the family of God, people occasionally get “sideways” with one another. Sometimes, it’s over trivial things. Snarky comments are made at a ministry team meeting, or there are disagreements over how the money for a youth fundraiser should be used. And sometimes, we get sideways with one another over truly sinful and downright evil things.

Lies get told, money goes missing, power gets protected, promises get broken, affairs take place, factions form. The picture of the “happy family of God” gets turned upside down, and it’s not going to fix itself unless we intentionally take action. So what does Jesus tell us to do in order to make things right?

(PP3) Step One: Jesus says, “Go!” - In chapter 18, Jesus lays out a basic outline for how we should go about making things right when we sin against one another. What is interesting about his words is the *urgency they convey*.

His first word to us, when sinned against, is to “Go!”(v. 15) There is no call to let the offense sit for a bit, or to gather advice from others, before actually addressing the issue with our brother or sister in Christ.

Jesus is pretty clear. If someone has sinned – that is, done something to offend the heart of God, and harm his or her relationship with you – then you must *go*. To put it another way, Jesus wants the church to be a community of individuals *who refuse to ignore destructive behavior*.

This, however, contrasts with how most churches deal with conflict. Let’s just say that the greatest spiritual gift at work in many

congregations is passive aggressiveness. We pretend problems don't exist and hope they go away. Fear of making things worse, or of hurting someone's feelings, leaves us paralyzed.

The problem seems to stem from a false belief that love equals a lack of conflict – that if love is truly present, then there will never be awkwardness or confrontation. But, in fact, the opposite is true. When real love is at work, confrontation, which sometimes does include residual awkwardness or momentary ugliness, is inevitable.

Love, especially among Christians, is not just a heartfelt affection for one another. It is a passionate desire for the will of God to be done in each other's lives. Therefore, when we see each other struggling, or feel the sting of one's sin, we *must* go – we must speak up. And yes, it will likely hurt. But all that hurts, is not necessarily harmful.

As a family of God, are we the type of people who avoid speaking up in order to avoid conflict? Are we the kind of community that encourages truth? Are we rooting for the will of God to win out in one another's lives, or are we focused simply on fostering good feelings?" Good questions to consider.

(PP4) Step Two: Jesus says, "Go by yourself." Jesus not only urges us to pursue our Christian brother or sister when they sin against us, but to do so *by ourselves*. We are to be a community of people who protect and respect the privacy and reputation of others, even when we are the victim.

It is incredibly tempting to make others aware of how someone else has wronged us. And honestly, it is easy to forget that these words of Jesus *apply to pastors and ministry leaders as well*, who often feel entitled as part of the job to let others in on the ways in which a particular person in the church has wronged them.

It is only supposed to be a last resort that we widen the circle in order to get things right-side-up with our fellow Christians. And even then, Jesus tells us to do so progressively, first with “two or three witnesses,” and only after that, to the church at large.

It is clear that Jesus’ goal for us, at every turn, is to minimize the amount of damage done to offenders, thus making it as easy as possible when they repent, to return to a joyful life in the community of believers.

(PP5) Step Three: Jesus tells us to “Engage the community, *if necessary.*” - Sadly, steps 1 and 2 don’t always work, which is why Jesus lays out one final way to get things “right-side up.” If the offender refuses to respond to the individual, or to the group, then they must be given the opportunity to respond to the church as a whole. Churches and denominations differ on just how, and when, this type of thing happens.

But no matter what form it takes, what Jesus lays out is pretty clear. In extreme circumstances, a boundary needs to be set. And, the boundary for acceptable, God-glorifying behavior – although delivered by the church – is to be seen as being set by God. In calling a sinful brother or sister to repentance, the church is simply communicating God’s standard – an expectation, for a joyful, forgiven and productive life in God's family.

Therefore, if the offender chooses not to embrace that standard, it is not the church kicking someone to the curb. It is the offender choosing to walk away from health and life, as God defines it. The opportunity for relationship was there and still remains, but sadly, sometimes people take a pass. Sometimes people choose to live sideways to God, and upside-down with the church.

But you know, Matthew 18 *is not really a chapter about church discipline.* It is a chapter about the danger of sin, and the beauty of

God's amazing grace – God's unmerited favor, that – in spite of all the upside-down stuff we've done – puts us right-side up.

Some things might need to happen, of course, like confession, repentance, or restitution. But, given these factors, God's grace is going to get things right. (PP5) In fact, God is a gyroscope of grace and goodness, constantly offering to us an undeserved place at the table.

God shows us our sin, but He does so with compassion. God does not whisper our infidelities to our neighbors, but invites us to return, and to be restored in full. It's like magic, isn't it? No matter how many times we turn or twist our lives away from God's will, God brings us right-side-up, without fail – thank God!

These words in Matthew 18 are a call for us to deal with one another the very same way God in Christ deals with us – that is, with a relentless, gracious pursuit to make things right.

It would be really great if relationships fixed themselves. But often, they don't. And yet, we must remember that we are not without a “gyroscope,” so to speak. There is a method by which things get “right-side up” in our lives.

In our relationship with God, it is Christ our Savior and Lord, who turns things around. But in our relationships within the church, by God's grace, it is His people who turn them around. May we embrace that calling - as tightly and as passionately as we embrace our smart phones! May God bless you all, Amen.

Benediction - Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." This world seeks violence, vengeance and retaliation. As you go from here this week, pursue peace. Be slow to anger, abounding in love. Be filled with gentleness, grace and kindness. Let the love of Jesus flow through you to all you meet. Go now in peace. Amen.

Call To Worship - Responsive

Call: We are gathered together in the name of Jesus, as the children of our loving Father God.

Response: May the peace of Christ be upon us.

Call: We are brothers and sisters, the family of God.

Response: May the peace of Christ be upon us.

Call: We don't always see eye to eye, but we look together towards our Savior.

Response: May the peace of Christ be upon us.

Call: Today we strip away what divides us and embrace what unites us.

Response: May the peace of Christ be upon us.

All: Holy Spirit, pour upon us the peace of Christ that we may live and love like him. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer - Father, you know that we have sinned. You know that we have hurt each other, been unkind, and thought only of ourselves. You have given us such grace and mercy; help us to extend the same to our brothers and sisters. Free us from holding grudges, from gossip, from passing judgment. Let us never pour shame upon another, but instead love and peace. Help us walk with each other towards forgiveness and restoration. Thank you for the beauty you will bring to our relationships because we have sought your healing. We are yours, Father. Amen.

Hymns

Amazing Grace

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy

Sermon Notes

Matthew 18:15-20

“Gyroscopic Grace”

- Smart Phones and other mobile devices have a “magical” feature called a gyroscope. It keeps whatever you are looking at right-side-up. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus urges us to keep our relationships right-side up. In the family of God, people occasionally get “sideways” with one another. So what does Jesus tell us to do in order to make things right?
- **Step One: Jesus says, “Go!”** - In chapter 18, Jesus lays out a basic outline for how we should go about making things right when we sin against one another. What is interesting about his words is the *urgency they convey*. His first word to us, when sinned against, is to “Go!”(v. 15) If someone has sinned – that is, done something to offend the heart of God, and harm his or her relationship with you – then you must *go*. Jesus wants the church to be a community of individuals *who refuse to ignore destructive behavior*.
- Love, especially among Christians, is not just a heartfelt affection for one another. It is a passionate desire for the will of God to be done in each other’s lives. Therefore, when we see each other struggling, or feel the sting of one’s sin, we *must go* – we must speak up. And yes, it will likely hurt. But all that hurts, is not necessarily harmful.
- **Step Two: Jesus says, “Go by yourself.”** Jesus not only urges us to pursue our Christian brother or sister when they sin against us, but to do so *by ourselves*. We are to be a community of people who protect and respect the privacy and reputation of others, even when we are the victim. It is clear that Jesus’ goal for us, at every turn, is to minimize the amount of damage done to offenders, thus making it as easy as possible when they repent, to return to a joyful life in the community of believers.
- **Step Three: Jesus tells us to “Engage the community, if necessary.”** - Sadly, steps 1 and 2 don’t always work, which is why Jesus lays out one final way to get things “right-side up.” If the offender refuses to respond to the individual, or to the group, then they must be given the opportunity to respond to the church as a whole. In calling a sinful brother or sister to repentance, the church is simply communicating God’s standard – an expectation, for a joyful, forgiven and productive life in God’s family.
- Matthew 18 *is not really a chapter about church discipline*. It is a chapter about the danger of sin, and the beauty of God’s amazing grace – God’s unmerited favor, that – in spite of all the upside-down stuff we’ve done – puts us right-side up. In fact, God is a gyroscope of grace and goodness, constantly offering to us an undeserved place at the table.
- In our relationship with God, it is Christ our Savior and Lord, who turns things around. But in our relationships within the church, by God’s grace, it is His people who turn them around.

May God bless you!

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“Gyroscopic Grace”

Correcting Another Believer

15 “If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.

16 But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses.

17 If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won’t accept the church’s decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

18 “I tell you the truth, whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.

19 “I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you.

20 For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.”